EP

UNITED NATIONS

Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/GC.18/31
23 March 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Eighteenth session
Nairobi, 15-26 May 1995
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

Review of the role and function of the regional representation of the United Nations Environment Programme, including a plan of action to enhance the process of strengthening the regional and liaison offices

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to Governing Council decision 17/28 of 21 May 1993, by which the Council requested the Executive Director to inform it at its eighteenth session on UNEP's regional representation, regional offices and liaison offices, including: information on size and location of regional and liaison offices and outposted staff, functions performed by regional representation, a mandate for UNEP's regional representation, and advice on action taken to improve regional representation. The present review of progress in reorienting UNEP regionally through internal managerial measures recognizes that additional efforts are required in 1996-1997 to realize fully the potential of UNEP's regional presence. The annex outlines the mandate, core functions and description of regional offices.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

(a) Recall its decision 17/28 of 21 May 1993 requesting the Executive Director to review the role and function of regional representation and inform the Council at its eighteenth session about UNEP's regional representation, regional offices and liaison offices;

(b) Note paragraph 38.23 of Agenda 21, in which UNEP is called upon to strengthen its regional offices without weakening its headquarters;

(c) Take note of the present report;

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* UNEP/GC.18/1.

(d) Reaffirm that UNEP needs a strong regional presence to implement its mandate;

(e) Endorse the managerial measures that the Executive Director is implementing to strengthen the regional office system;

(f) Encourage the Executive Director to continue seeking measures to strengthen the regional presence of UNEP through effective partnerships with other regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations and through region-specific fund-raising;

(g) Request the Executive Director to keep under review the appropriate configuration of regional offices, the relationship between regional and outposted offices of UNEP and future development of subregional offices as circumstances warrant and resources become available.

A. Impact of Agenda 21 on the role of UNEP

1. The international context prevailing subsequent to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) demands a strengthened role for UNEP as the leading instrument of the international community to raise the world's consciousness of actions which are creating negative environmental conditions. Agenda 21 confirmed that UNEP should provide the environmental policy leadership within the world community, and in particular the United Nations system, by focusing on:

(a) The assessment of environmental change and its relationships with socio-economic driving forces, as well as impacts on human well-being and the integrity of natural systems, and identification of emerging issues of global significance;

(b) The facilitation of consensus-building on environmental issues and the development of policy options to support strategic decision-making to respond to those issues, particularly through the fostering of regional and subregional cooperation;

(c) The catalysis of responsive action by Governments and intergovernmental bodies as well as scientific institutions, the private sector and community groups.

B. The UNEP approach to regions

2. Agenda 21 (in para. 38.21 (k)) charges UNEP, inter alia, with "the promotion of subregional and regional cooperation and support to relevant initiatives and programmes for environmental protection, including playing a major role in the regional mechanisms in the field of environment identified for the follow-up to the Conference". Agenda 21 specifically calls for the strengthening of the regional offices without weakening UNEP headquarters. A major upgrading of the UNEP regional presence is critical to its success in fulfilling its post-UNCED mission and meeting the goals set for it in Agenda 21.

3. There are six reasons why UNEP must strengthen its regional presence. First, in addressing the major driving forces that cause negative environmental changes, UNEP must interact more with consumers and producers worldwide, since these are the sources of environmental problems. UNEP must also build better relations with education and media resources worldwide. These types of outreach cannot be done from headquarters to be effective, they must be done regionally.

4. Second, each of the four tools at UNEP's disposal - assessment, consensus-building, information and education, and technical assistance - works best with a strong regional component, recognizing regional differences in governmental capacities, requirements and aspirations.

5. Third, to carry out each of the activities specified in Agenda 21, UNEP must rely to a great and increasing extent on activities within the regions. This is self-evident in the case of regional and subregional collaboration, and of information and education activities. With its headquarters in Nairobi, UNEP can play a catalytic role in the global United Nations system only through more reliance on regional offices, especially those in New York and Geneva. The areas of policy, policy techniques, assessment and research and environmental law also require strong regional activity. Work in these areas which is carried out in isolation from regional perceptions and concerns will be of limited value because it will lack credibility with Governments and others responsible for actions based upon this work.

6. Fourth, to strengthen regional offices without weakening Nairobi headquarters implies better integration between regional office and headquarters activities, and more concentration on the regional implications of all UNEP activity.

7. Fifth, in order to work more closely with other United Nations agencies, particularly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, UNEP must find ways and means to promote better and bring the environmental dimension to bear in their development work. Both UNDP and the World Bank maintain very strong programmes at the country level. From its regional strongholds UNEP can complement and support the work of these two agencies, particularly by providing environmental advisory services and information and a coordinated regional orientation. Strengthened regional offices will also assist UNEP in its cooperation with the regional commissions.

8. Sixth, UNEP, like many United Nations agencies, has limited resources relative to its mandate and little prospect of significantly increased funding from traditional sources. Accordingly, it must increase its efforts to form partnerships with other organizations, thereby leveraging the greatest impact from the funds available. Many of the most productive types of partnership are at the regional level, and the process of forming and maintaining partnerships is most effectively achieved through heavy regional involvement.

C. Reorienting UNEP regionally

9. Creating a strong regional representation programme in UNEP has three distinct aspects:

(a) Changing the role of regional offices within UNEP, from being subordinate implementers of policies and programmes originating at headquarters, to being equal partners in design and delivery of programmes;

(b) Devising a regional representation programme in which regional offices coordinate the overall programme portfolio of UNEP's resources and services to respond to the specific needs of each region;

(c) Building strong outreach programmes, partnerships and networks in each region, which will, among other activities:

(i) Provide comprehensive regional feedback and perspective on all UNEP programmes and activities, be they global, regional or local;

(ii) Present UNEP throughout the region as a technical resource that can be called upon for consulting, assistance and consensus-building.

10. Changing the role of the regional offices within UNEP is a prerequisite for success. For this reason, UNEP addressed this change first, during the transitional year of 1994. Moving to develop a programme portfolio for regional delivery will depend on the unique characteristics of each region.

Building networks and partnerships has been a long-standing activity of regional offices. However, this work must be intensified, formalized to a greater degree, and expanded beyond Governments and traditional non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

D. Progress to date

11. Strengthening UNEP's regional representation in line with Agenda 21 is as much a process as a series of discrete actions. The key internal steps to institutionalize the new approach will have all been taken by 1995; the full impact of these changes will not be apparent until 1996 or beyond. Action has been taken in the following specific areas:

- New regional director reporting relationships;
- New regional director core functions;
- Regional programme consultation requirement;
- New management strategy;
- Regional emphasis in the 1994-1995 programme of work, and in the proposed programme for 1996-1997;
- Other steps to improve credibility and effectiveness of regional offices.

E. New reporting relationships for regional directors

12. Two major changes have been made to strengthen UNEP's regional representation. First, regional directors now report directly to the Executive Director. This change not only recognizes the critical role of the regional offices, but also allows them more administrative flexibility, more capacity to act independently, and greater ability to respond quickly to emerging events.

13. Second, regional directors have been made full members of the Management Board. This makes them full participants in corporate-level decision-making, and better equips them to discharge their regional responsibilities. From a corporate perspective, this arrangement ensures that regional concerns are explicitly taken into account in corporate decision-making; it also sends a clear message to all the UNEP staff, in headquarters and in regional offices, as to the importance as of regional office activities.

14. These two changes also have a powerful impact on the credibility of regional directors outside UNEP - they give the directors greater ability to represent UNEP in their regions, to form networks, and to create partnerships.

F. Core functions of regional directors

15. Over the period October-December 1993, the Executive Director worked interactively with regional directors to define core responsibilities common to all regional directors. The annex to the present report outlines the functions performed by UNEP regional directors.

16. Comparing responsibilities of regional directors in 1994 with those described in UNEP/GC.15/5/Add.3, "Introductory report of the Executive Director: UNEP's regional office system" of 21 March 1989, is a measure of the increased importance given to regional activities. In addition to the types of activities described in that report, directors now have five additional responsibilities:

(a) Effective delivery of UNEP programmes within a region;

(b) Participation in policy and strategic direction as a member of the Management Board;

(c) Fostering of regional and subregional cooperation;

(d) Effective management of resources;

(e) Brokerage of international conventions.

17. Even in areas where there is a superficial similarity between regional office activities in 1989 and 1994, the 1994 expectations of regional offices are far higher, and more important to the success of UNEP's mission. For example:

(a) In the past, regional office representational work was primarily support for the Executive Director, while current regional directors themselves represent UNEP;

(b) In 1989, regional office technical assistance was minimal, because offices lacked access to technical resources, and were not coordinated with headquarters activities. Through better coordination with headquarters, and access to resources through the portfolio approach, regional directors are beginning to be able to offer a range of credible technical consulting capacities within their regions;

(c) In 1989, information-gathering by regional offices was "uneven" and "not clearly defined". However, under the current approach, regional offices are required to give continuous feedback to headquarters and, in particular, to work through environment ministers within their regions to define needs and priority assessments as a key input to the development of UNEP's work programme.

G. Regional programme consultation requirement

18. In order to integrate better the work of regional offices and headquarters, and to ensure that headquarters' programmes reflect regional priorities, a decision was taken that no activity could be initiated in any region without advance consultation and agreement with the appropriate regional director. Similarly, regional directors cannot initiate activity in any programme area without prior consultation and agreement with the appropriate programme manager.

19. That directive has had a major impact in ensuring better coordination of activity between regions and headquarters. As regional offices improve their capacity to assess and articulate needs and priorities within their regions, this mechanism will ensure that UNEP's programming becomes more tightly focused on the needs of each region. The annex to the present report provides more information on the location, staffing and funding of regional offices.

H. New management strategy

20. The management strategy adopted by UNEP emphasizes results management, responsive service, partnerships, regional delivery and integration. The emphasis on regional delivery and on responsive service reflects the overall reorientation of UNEP towards a more regionally-based approach; the other strategic directions reinforce the approach taken to regional representation.

I. Regional emphasis in the 1994-1995 programme of work, and the proposed programme for 1996-1997

21. In drawing up the 1994-1995 programme, a systematic attempt was made to have regional priorities articulated through regional offices and built into the development of programmes by managers. In addition, the regional breakdown of subprogramme spending was given in detail, as was the activity of regional offices.

22. By spelling out this degree of regional detail for itself and others, UNEP is now in a position for the first time to assess and effectively manage its overall impact in each region. It can compare its total impact in each region with the priorities stated by the regions. It can assess the contribution of each regional office to each programme, and the contribution of each programme to meeting regional priorities.

23. The regional details in the 1994-1995 programme are especially important for two reasons. First, they provide the base data from which regional offices can develop portfolios of resources to present in their respective regions. Second, the data show clearly the degree to which UNEP programmes may lack regional focus and congruence with regional priorities.

24. Regional delivery of UNEP's programmes was a major consideration in elaborating the proposed programme of work: Fund programme activities for the biennium 1996-1997 (UNEP/GC.18/9). Once the proposed programme is adopted by the Governing Council, the next step will be the formulation of the specific operational plans for each of the regions, taking into consideration the views of regional intergovernmental forums. These plans will reflect all of the activities that UNEP intends to undertake in regions, and their implementation would be coordinated by each regional director.

J. Other steps to improve credibility and effectiveness of regional offices

25. A number of other steps taken over the last year are important milestones in the strengthening of regional representation. These include:

(a) Appointment of highly qualified and politically experienced regional directors;

(b) Closing the Washington liaison office and transferring its responsibilities to New York, thereby potentially enhancing the capacity of the New York office, while reducing financial costs;

(c) Posting information officers to regional offices as a first step to enhance the public information capacity of offices, as well as moving resources closer to the nerve centres of the global media;

(d) Improvements in use of technology in communications linkages between Nairobi and regional offices, thereby enhancing the capacity for information flow;

(e) More use of secondments from headquarters and programme offices in the regions to regional offices, thereby enhancing the technical capacity of regional offices on an as-needed basis, e.g. seconding programme officers from the Industry and Environment Programme Activity Centre in Paris.

K. Completing the reorientation

26. The steps already taken, and the changes currently under way, are enabling UNEP to meet the mandate entrusted to it in Agenda 21 to strengthen regional offices without weakening Nairobi headquarters. Indeed, as the changes take full effect over the next two years, there is every indication that a revitalized regional office system will enhance, rather than weaken, the overall credibility and effectiveness of the Nairobi headquarters by making it more aware of the environmental priorities, needs and progress in each part of the world.

27. In order to follow through on the changes already made, and to complete the regional reorientation of UNEP, a number of further steps are required. Some of these are already under way in some regions, while others are the logical extension of changes already made. The key milestones in completing the reorientation include:

(a) For completion in 1995:

(i) Completion of the 1996-1997 work programme, which will clearly recognize regional priorities as derived from regional offices' outreach to Governments in their regions;

(ii) Amendment of job descriptions of programme managers and directors of UNEP programme offices in the regions to reflect the fact that their core responsibilities include support for the efforts of regional offices to provide a portfolio of expertise within their regions;

(iii) Development by each regional office of a programme portfolio approach appropriate to its region;

(b) Starting in 1995, for completion in 1996:

(i) Drawing up of operational plans for implementation of the 1996-1997 programme within each region, as approved by the Governing Council, taking into account the regional needs and priorities as expressed by regional intergovernmental forums;

(ii) Reassessment of public information activities at headquarters, and the degree to which such regional redirection of activities could be undertaken in support of regional office outreach activities in a cost-effective manner;

(iii) Assessment of the potential of more intensive use of emerging technologies such as Internet and other on-line systems as a public information alternative at both the regional and the global levels;

(iv) Preparation of a strategy to supplement outreach to Governments and United Nations agencies with outreach and networking to consumers, businesses and academia within the region.

28. As these changes are fully implemented, new working relationships and new ways of working will evolve among regional offices, other offices in the regions, and Nairobi headquarters. At this stage, many other possibilities to enhance regional presence - and at the same time enhance the regional relevance of work at headquarters - will emerge. As one small example, it may be possible to include a greater regional component in the biennial publication on the state of the environment. Not only might the publication contain more regional detail, but the process of producing the publication might draw more on expertise provided by regional office directors from the networks created by their outreach programmes.

L. Future considerations

29. UNEP is an information-based organization. As such, its success depends critically on its ability in three areas:

(a) Speedy and accurate collation of relevant information from around the world;

(b) Analysis and processing of that information in pursuit of its goals;

(c) Timely and accurate delivery of information for decision-making to Governments.

30. To implement effectively its consensus-building and information clearing-house role, UNEP clearly needs to have a strong regional presence. The capacity of regional offices and their coverage area is proportional, of course, to the financial resources available. At present these resources are inadequate to provide a configuration of regional offices able to service

better areas such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the vast Asia and Pacific region. The idea of subregional offices and strategic relocation is constrained by both financial and political implications.

31. In view of these limitations, the strengthening of the regional presence of UNEP in the immediate future has to be based on internal managerial measures, such as the ones described above, and on the establishment of effective partnerships with other organizations.

32. The changes outlined in the present document have improved and will continue to improve significantly the effectiveness of overall regional representation. However, they cannot give UNEP the regional presence it needs to fulfil its mandate. In particular, they do not offer additional resources to those areas least well served by the existing configuration of regional offices, particularly the vast Asia and Pacific region served by a single office in Bangkok.

33. At the same time, it is unlikely there will be funding for more regional representation in the foreseeable future. An increased regional presence can therefore only come from partnerships, one of UNEP's management strategies. It is recommended that, during the biennium 1996-1997, UNEP aggressively seek, through regional office outreach programmes and through headquarters activities, partnerships which will allow it to improve its regional presence in those areas currently least well served.

Annex

MANDATE, CORE FUNCTIONS AND DESCRIPTION OF REGIONAL OFFICES

1. Mandate for regional representation

Governing Council decisions 15/15; 10/2, sections I-VI.

Agenda 21:

- Included in the priority areas on which UNEP should concentrate: "Promotion of subregional and regional cooperation and support to relevant initiatives and programmes for environmental protection including playing a major contributing and coordinating role in the regional mechanisms in the field of environment identified for the follow-up to the Conference" (para. 38.22 (k);

- "In order for UNEP to perform all of these functions, while retaining its role as the principal body within the United Nations system in the field of environment and taking into account the development aspects of environmental questions, it would require access to greater expertise and provision of adequate financial resources and it would require closer cooperation and collaboration with development and other relevant organs of the United Nations system. Furthermore, the regional offices of UNEP should be strengthened without weakening its headquarters in Nairobi, and UNEP should take steps to reinforce and intensify its liaison and interaction with UNDP and the World Bank" (para. 38.23).

2. The core functions performed by UNEP's regional directors are the following:

(a) Represent UNEP and ensure effective delivery of the programme within the respective geographic regions;

(b) Represent the interests of the respective regions through participation in UNEP's Management Board in the formulation of policy, strategic direction, resource allocation and performance standards;

(c) Promote regional and subregional cooperation and support relevant initiatives and programmes for environmental action in the region;

(d) Manage effectively and efficiently the resources and facilities assigned to the region with a view to increasing the environmental capabilities in the region;

(e) Provide continuous feedback to headquarters on the issues and needs of Governments and partners in the region;

(f) Initiate, develop and maintain effective working relationships with Governments, regional United Nations organizations, particularly the regional economic commissions, the UNDP regional and country offices, and non-governmental organizations, providing a forum for the reflection of common regional environmental problems and the promotion of solutions;

(g) Support Governments, upon request, and international and regional development agencies and organizations in the integration of environmental aspects into their development policies and programmes, in particular through the provision of environmental, technical and policy advice during programme formulation and implementation;

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(h) Raise public awareness and disseminate information on UNEP and environmental issues.

The relationship between regional offices and headquarters is one of complementarity, mutual reinforcement and cohesiveness. Regional offices ensure that UNEP's global mandate and ensuing activities are translated into region-specific programmes.

3. Location, staffing, and funding of regional offices, 1994-1995

NAME AND ACRONYM	LOCATION		STAFFING								FUNDING**					
			Professionals								General Service		1994-1995 Allocation (US$ '000)			TOTAL
			D-2	D-1	P-5	P-4	P-3	P-2	Total				Regular budget	Environment Programme	Programme & programme support costs	
Regional Office for Africa (ROA)	Nairobi, Kenya	A			1	2			4		3					
		B	1		1		1		2	6	5	8		2,160	650	2,810
Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP)	Bangkok, Thailand	A			2	1	1		4		1					
		B	1		1				2	6	5	6		2,160	1,360	3,520
Regional Office for Europe (ROE)	Geneva, Switzerland	A			3	1			4		0					0
		B	1		1	1	1		4	8	9	9	878	1,620	2,218	4,716
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC)	Mexico City, Mexico	A			2	1	2		5		15					0
		B	1		1				2	7	5	20		2,160	2,387	4,547
Regional Office for North America (RONA)	New York, U.S.A.	A			1				1		0					0
		B	1		1		1		3	4	6	6	543	1,080	1,440	3,063
Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA)	Manama, Bahrain	A			1	1			2		1					0
		B	1		1				2	4	5	6		1,620	1,580	3,200
Arab League Liaison Office (ALLO)*	Cairo, Egypt	A		1												
		B										6				
TOTAL		A														
		B	6	1	16	7	6	0	36	36	57	57	1,421	10,800	9,635	21,856

A. Staff for regional delivery of subprogrammes financed by the programme of work.
B. Staff financed by regular budget and programme and programme support costs (PPSC) budget.

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* ROWA supervises the activities of the Arab League Liaison Office (ALLO). ROWA's budget includes ALLO's budget.
** Includes funds under the direct responsibility of the Regional Director. It does not include funds for regional delivery from other subprogrammes.